League of Women Voters' unit accused of CIA contacts

By Robert Gruenberg
Of Our Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — An organization that claims to counterspy on U.S. security agencies has charged that a League of Women Voters overseas affiliate maintains contacts with the Central Intelligence Agency in Panama and Korea.

The purpose, said the group, which calls itself the Fifth Estate, is to collect political intelligence on the population generally, but particularly on various women's groups in Latin America and Asia.

It was done, it was charged, under the guise of improving the organizations and making them more influential in their own communities.

THE ACTION was carried out by the Overseas Education Fund OEF, which receives much of its money from the State Department and the Agency for International Development (AID), said Winslow Peck, who said he was a former intelligence analyst with the national security agency.

Peck said the Fifth Estate is financed by small sums from foundations and by author Norman Mailer.

Peck acknowledged the OEF funds could not be traced exactly to a specific part of the CIA budget.

Mrs. Caroline Wood, OEF executive director, when asked about the Fifth Estate charges made public at a press conference, issued a written statement saying, in part:

"To our knowledge, none of our work has been funded directly or indirectly by the CIA and we have never knowingly provided information through our headquarters or field staff for use by the CIA."

MRS. WOOD explained that the OEF — which she described as an educational affiliate of the League of Women Voters, although with separate staff and funding — did provide data to the State Department about the persons whom the OEF would recommend be brought to the United States on leader grants.

The purpose of such information was "so the people should be cleared." The grants were to finance trips by selected women to learn more about the United States and its institutions.

Asked if the OEF would discuss the question of possible CIA funding with the State Department in the light of the charges, Mrs. Wood replied, "We may," and repeated that heretofore the OEF "had never had any indication" of such activity.